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Les Nubians

Sisterly duo Les Nubians - aka C-Lia (Célia) and LN (Hélène) - owe their lightning rise to fame to fans in America who sent their debut album rocketing to the top of the charts. The Franco-Cameroonian duo mix a diverse range of influences, fusing them into an original, and highly personal, sound.

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Born on 27 September 1978 and 8 October 1974 to a French father and Cameroonian mother, Celia and Hélène Faussart spent their childhood growing up in Paris. However, in 1984 the Faussart family moved to Chad where the girls got a taste of African culture. The family moved back to France in the early 90s, fleeing the civil war in Chad and set up their new home in Bordeaux.

Hélène and Célia both went on to university, where Hélène studied law and Celia opted for sociology. But the sisters spent most of their spare time together, working on their music. The girls' early influences were interestingly diverse, ranging from Ella Fitzgerald and Nigerian mega-star Fela to legendary African diva Myriam Makeba. Right from the beginning of their career, Hélène and Celia chose to base their style around vocal harmonies and militant lyrics.

The sisters launched their career on the Bordeaux music scene, playing in local youth clubs, social centres and other small venues. Building up a solid reputation on the local scene with their excellent live act featuring covers of Nina Simone, Myriam Makeba and Bob Marley, Les Nubians soon went on to support a wide range of music stars including **Youssou N'Dour**, **Julien Clerc** and James Brown. Meanwhile, in their spare time, the sisters got involved with Les Nouveaux Griots, a local association which organised concerts, exhibitions and various activities for children.

First Major Break

Following their success on the local scene, friends and colleagues soon began encouraging the sisters to record a demo tape. Hélène and Celia were not entirely convinced by this advice, but went ahead and recorded a tape anyway. And bingo! Virgin zoomed in on the Nubian sound and invited the sisters into the studio to record a track for the compilation album "Jazz à Saint Germain", released in 1997. Impressed by Hélène and Célia's vocals, Thierry Planelle (the producer in charge of the "Jazz à Saint Germain" project) offered the sisters the chance of recording their own album and Virgin instantly signed Les Nubians as singer-songwriters.

By this stage of their career, Hélène was taking singing and guitar lessons and soon sat down to start writing the duo's first material. The sisters locked themselves away to work on their own in the run-up to production, then teamed up with Mounir Belkiri, a well-known DJ/composer/songwriter from Marseilles. What's more, a crack team of musicians from the British soul scene were also brought in to play on Les Nubians' first album. As far as the lyrics went, Hélène and Célia were on exactly the same wavelength, choosing to base their work around women's issues, the black community and their African roots. The duo gave their songs instantly evocative titles such as "Princesse Nubienne" and "Makeda" (the name of the Queen of Sheba). While the sisters' lyrics were uncompromisingly militant, they managed to weave a certain sensuality into their album, performing songs like "Embrasse-moi" (Kiss Me) written by **Princess Erika** and "Tabou", a French cover of the hit by British/Nigerian soul diva Sade.

Fame In The U.S.

The sisters' debut album, "Princesses Nubiennes", was released in May '98 and "Makeda" was swiftly chosen as the first single release. The Nubians' album failed to make any major impact on the French charts but in September of that year, "Princesses Nubiennes" was released in the U.S. on the American label Higher Octave. Within a few weeks of its release, the Nubians' album received extensive radio airplay and the French duo began to make a tentative name for themselves in the States. Between February and May '99, Les Nubians performed several mini-tours in North America, going on to hit Las Vegas in October and bring the house down at the Paris Las Vegas Hotel (on 29 and 30 October). In between their American tours, Hélène and Celia also performed several concerts in France (in April '99). But the sisters' French concerts made a lot less impact than their shows in the States, where their album continued to walk out of the stores, going on to sell 300,000 copies - a phenomenal achievement for an album recorded in French!

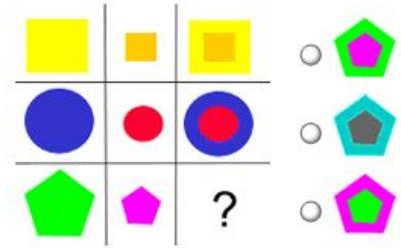
Les Nubians' "Afropean" identity and their sensual soul/hip hop grooves have totally seduced the Afro-American community as well as other music fans in the States. And - judging by the way LN and C-Lia got the audience grooving when they played the Bataclan in Paris on 30 November - it looks as if the sisters' career may be about to take off back home too!

The year 2000 brought the Nubians new success in America, the dawning of the Millennium seeing the sisters nominated at the **NAACP** (National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People) **Image Awards**. This nomination came hot on the heels of the Nubians' triumph at the Soul Train Awards in the autumn of '99 where the French duo walked off with the award for "Best Newcomers of the Year".

One step forward

After a few delays, the Nubians' second piece of work came out in March 2003. Entitled "One Step Forward" and produced by Mounir from Marseilles and IG Culture from London, the album featured a mix of musical genres, such as soul, African rhythms, r'n'b and Chanson, and it was sung in French as well as in English. What was at stake this time again for the two sisters was to cast the light on their African cultural heritage, in such songs as "Immortel Cheikh Anta Diop". Another track on the album "La Guerre" conveyed a message of peace.

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Their first single was entitled "J'veux d'la musique".

At the beginning of March, they began a series of concerts in the U.S., where they were met with a huge success. And after a short interruption, they walked back onto American stages where they were accompanied by their colleagues from Zap Mama.

In 2004, the sisterly double act continued their extensive international tour schedule, playing dates across west and north Africa and Japan. They also performed a handful of concerts in France. Later that same year, Les Nubians teamed up with veteran French 'chanson' star Henri Salvador for a snappy little bossa number: "Que le mot soit perle." The song was included on "Unisida Sénégal" (a fund-raising compilation whose proceeds were donated to a charity for AIDs orphans in Africa).

On 11 October 2005, Les Nubians released their third album "Echos-Chapter One: Nubian Voyager." The album, which the sisters had been working on since 2000, was an innovative project bringing together traditional music and the world of slam (urban poetry). Working with a number of leading urban poets and their loyal producer Mounir Belkhir, the sisters recorded a series of songs paying tribute to Africa. On 18 December 2005, Les Nubians presented extracts from their new album at Le New Morning in Paris. They went on to announce a series of French concert dates with rap outfit Beat Assailant at the start of 2006.

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